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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000377

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: SPEAKER AL-KHORAFI BLEAK ON UPCOMING ELECTIONS

REF: A. KUWAIT 53
[B. KUWAIT 372](#)
[C. KUWAIT 349](#)
[D. BAGHDAD 937](#)

Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and d

Summary:

[1](#)1. (C) Former Speaker of the Kuwaiti National Assembly Jassem Al-Khorafi informed Ambassador privately (and later announced publicly) his intention to run in the May 16 parliamentary elections. He predicted that the ongoing strife between the legislative and executive branches would continue and said he was nominating himself reluctantly, "for the good of the country," following pressure from the Amir. He laid blame for Kuwait's weak government on the dysfunctional ruling Al Sabahs and asserted that MinDef Shaykh Jaber al-Mubarak would replace Shaykh Nasser as PM -- a decision to be taken because there is no good alternative. Al-Khorafi chided Iraqi PM Al-Maliki for using the war debt issue for "political convenience" at the April 4 Doha Summit. End summary.

Al-Khorafi A "Reluctant" Candidate for Parliament

[1](#)2. (C) Former Speaker of Parliament Jassem Al-Khorafi (the third ranking in governmental protocol) announced on April 14 his candidacy for the May 16 National Assembly elections. In an earlier meeting with Ambassador while awaiting his visa on April 13, Khorafi confided that it had been his intention to "retire" but the Amir had urged him to run again. Nonetheless, despite his public declarations that he desired to serve the nation and protect democratic practice, Khorafi told Ambassador that his outlook for Kuwait's future was bleak, and he had little hope that new faces in parliament and government would ease the ongoing political woes in the country. He laid most of the blame for governmental dysfunction on the ruling family, charging that disunity among the Al Sabahs was wreaking political chaos. He confirmed that PM Shaykh Nasser al-Mohammad would not return to government: "He had his chance, five times over! Shaykh Nasser is a nice guy, someone you marry to your daughter, but not one fit to govern a nation."

The CP/PM Merger Question

[1](#)3. (C) Khorafi traced much of the ongoing confusion surrounding PM succession to a 2003 decision that separated -- for the first time in Kuwaiti history -- the posts of Crown Prince and Prime Minister. (Note: This decision is largely believed to have been taken to accommodate the political ambition of the PM of the time, current Amir Shaykh

Sabah. End note.) He told Ambassador that many Kuwaitis believe that whomever is appointed PM would eventually succeed the Crown Prince, a post traditionally granted to members of the Al-Jaber and Al-Salem branches of the Al Sabah family. Despite this supposed order of succession, Khorafi confidently predicted that current MinDef Shaykh Jaber al-Mubarak al-Hamad Al Sabah (who is not a member of one of the Amiri succession branches) would be appointed PM after the May elections but would not become the Crown Prince. That said, Khorafi offered that Shaykh Jaber's appointment to the post of PM might signify a potential Amiri willingness to open premiership opportunities to those outside the traditional succession branches -- a move that would likely receive widespread support from those who favor outside leadership.

Khorafi: Shortage of Viable Candidates for PM Role

¶4. (C) Khorafi was skeptical that Shaykh Jaber al-Mubarak would be effective as PM, as he is not an eloquent speaker and lacks the requisite charisma to handle an unruly parliament. Furthermore, he has expressed in the past his desire that the Amir unconstitutionally dissolve parliament, a point that several of the MinDef's detractors have raised publicly. Khorafi also suggested that Shaykh Jaber lacks popular support and has no connection to the younger generation of Kuwaitis. Notwithstanding his disdain for Shaykh Jaber as a possible PM, Khorafi admitted there are few other likely candidates. Topping the list of outside prospects for the job is Amiri nephew Shaykh Ahmad Al-Fahd (presently head of the National Security Bureau), whom

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Khorafi summarily dismissed as a contender on grounds that, though he connects with the citizenry due to his highly public role in Kuwait's sports (ref A), he is "hated" by too many power brokers.

Electoral Free-For-All: Opportunity for Women?

¶5. (C) Other than the Amir's April 12 directive that the government use all legal means to prosecute "those who threaten national unity" (ref B) -- a threat that has proved meaningless to date, there has been little connection between leadership and constituency in Kuwait. Ambassador asserted to Khorafi the need for the Amir to communicate with the voters. Khorafi concurred, and opined that since the GOK appears reluctant to shape the outcome of the elections to the ruling family's advantage, tribalists will again exploit the process for their gain. On the brighter side he predicted that -- amidst the confusion -- two women will likely gain seats in the next parliament, a development he welcomed and thought would provide a moderating balance to the inevitable tribal victories in the outlying constituencies.

Fixing a Malfunctioning Government

¶6. (C) Khorafi told Ambassador of his recommendation to the Amir to appoint a mini-Council of Ministers, a body comprised of three deputy prime ministers with known acumen in foreign affairs, defense and social matters to govern the cabinet and who would manage the day-to-day affairs of parliament rather than having to convene the full Council of Ministers for every decision regardless of their expertise on the subject matter, or lack thereof. He added that increasing the number of technocrats in the cabinet would lead to increased efficiency in the ministries and -- hopefully -- less confrontation with parliament. This recommendation, he said, echoes the advice given to the Amir by former UK PM Tony Blair during a recent visit. (Note: Blair reportedly has been hired by the GOK to advise on governmental reform, with a six figure fee. End note.)

Amiri Doha Encounter with Al-Maliki

17. (C) Khorafi told Ambassador that in the Amir's meeting with Iraqi PM Al-Maliki in the margins of the April 4 Doha Summit, Maliki had raised the issue of debt reparations and the Amir reminded him that the Kuwaiti practice has been neither to pursue nor cancel payments of compensation due Kuwait. Khorafi chided Maliki over the "unwise" GOI practice of raising matters like debt compensation for political convenience.

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